



▲ *Spider and web*, Everglades National Park, (Florida).

LOOKING AHEAD

► RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE, AND THE 21st CENTURY

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The biologist Edward O. Wilson has predicted that a day will come when “the flora and fauna of a country will be thought part of the national heritage as important as its art, its language, and that astonishing blend of achievement and farce that has always defined our species.” Cast in that light, we see these resources in the context of the generations. We have inherited them from our predecessors; we seek to pass them on to our progeny. If we embrace Wilson’s idea, we must turn to the question of what it will take to be successful in accomplishing that task.

For most of the 20th century we have practiced a curious combination of active management (deer are good, wolves are bad) and passive acceptance (if we leave it alone, it will be all right), while becoming a superb visitor services agency. In the 21st century that management style is clearly insufficient. Regional, and in some cases global, influences impact the resources of parks and protected areas. Our ignorance of natural resources and their interrelationship remains profound.

If we are to achieve our intergenerational task, we will need to expand existing inventory programs and develop effective techniques that monitor the vital signs of natural systems. We need to enlist others in the scientific community to help but also facilitate *their* inquiry. We need to integrate these efforts with an educational component so that child and adult, amateur and professional, benefit from the knowledge

uncovered in these places. This information should be widely available, not just to those who visit the sites.

The information contained in these places should be part of a larger continuum that assists the surrounding community (regional and global) in making choices. If we return to the heritage idea, these parks and protected places should become increasingly “useful” to surrounding communities, not as board-feet of timber or tons of minerals, but as benchmarks of environmental information.

Some years ago I was on a program with the writer Barry Lopez. He had just finished writing *Arctic Dreams* and he expanded on the role of the storyteller in the Arctic. From that he sketched a role for his audience of park rangers: “You are storytellers,” he said. “You tell stories so that people will recognize patterns to help them lead decent and dignified lives.”

I can think of no better role for resource managers in the 21st century.